POLICY FOR PEACE IN OUR PACIFIC REGION

Here are the Women II
Introduction

The 10th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) was catalytic as Pacific Leaders put into motion action for the integration of 1325 into the regional peace and security architecture. What resulted was the high level development and adoption of a Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (RAP-WPS) elevating commitments articulated within existing regional mechanisms into tangible action-oriented strategies.

The formulation of the action plan was informed by the efforts of Pacific activists who belong to the Pacific Women’s Media and Policy Network on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Coordinated by FemLINKPACIFIC, the group includes Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency, Vois Blong Mere Solomon and Ma’a Fafine mo e Famili of Tonga.

The action plan focuses on three pillars: (i) gender mainstreaming and women’s leadership in conflict prevention and management, political decision-making and peacebuilding and peacekeeping; (ii) gender mainstreaming and women’s participation in security sector oversight and accountability; and (iii) protection of women’s human rights in transitional and post-conflict contexts.

While the implementation of the action plan has the oversight of Reference Group on Women, Peace and Security convened by the Pacific Islands Forum which includes representatives of governments (Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea and Tonga) and civil society (FemLINKPACIFIC and Leitana Nehan Women’s Development Agency), the responsibility of implementation should not be left to this reference group or the Forum Regional Security Committee alone. It is therefore critical to strengthen and sustain regional and domestic efforts by women’s civil society networks who have a stake in defining and managing peace and security from the local to the global level.

This report aims to provide linkages to women’s voices through a review of the 2009-2011 Policy for Peace in our Pacific reports as well as insights from the members of the GPPAC Pacific Regional Steering Group and gender focal points, this publication services as a reminder and further affirmation of women’s peace and security narratives from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Bougainville and Tonga which have informed the development of the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and which can further guide and inform the localization of the regional action plan.

Commitments to Gender, Peace and Security

Global experience of developing National and Regional Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security has resulted in four core goals for advancing implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security): i) Prevention: Prevention of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations; ii) Participation: women participate equally with men and gender equality is promoted in peace and security decision-making processes at local, national, regional and international levels and; iii) Protection: Women’s and girls’ rights are protected and promoted in conflict-affected situations and; iv) Relief and Recovery: highlighting the need to meet women and girls’ specific relief needs and to ensure that women’s capacities to act as agents in relief and recovery are reinforced in humanitarian crises and conflict and post-conflict situations.

This Regional Action Plan is broad-based to the extent that it focuses on conflict/post-conflict, transitional contexts and humanitarian settings. This is based on practice that humanitarian, peacebuilding and conflict prevention scenarios and responses are inter-linked. The RAP also focuses efforts on preventing conflict not just responding once violence erupts and governance systems are disrupted.

It is worth noting that there are significant efforts underway in the region to ensure women are protected from gender and sexual-based violence and that women and girl’s relief and recovery needs are met following natural disasters and other humanitarian crises, and as such the focus in the Regional Action Plan on those areas is limited only to where added value is discernible from a women, peace and security perspective.

On the basis of consultations, existing commitments and activities in the above areas, the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the Pacific focuses on three strategic pillars: i) gender mainstreaming and women’s leadership in conflict prevention and management, political decision-making and peacebuilding and peacekeeping; ii) gender mainstreaming and women’s participation in security sector oversight and accountability and; iii) protection of women’s human rights in transitional and post-conflict contexts.

Pressure to implement the RAP policies is critical in the light of a series of national elections and other important events in the forthcoming year:

- National elections planned in Tonga in November 2014
- National elections scheduled in Fiji in 2014
- National elections in Solomon Islands in 2014
- Referendum in Papua New Guinea’s Autonomous Region of Bougainville in 2015

Commitment to the Implementation of the RAP

The implementation of the RAP is not an end in itself. It is a continuous process that requires sustained efforts and investments. The following strategies are recommended to ensure the effective implementation of the RAP:

1. Strengthening institutional mechanisms: The implementation of the RAP requires the establishment of institutional mechanisms at national and regional levels to ensure coordination and cooperation among stakeholders.

2. Advocacy and awareness-raising: Advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns are crucial to mobilize support for the implementation of the RAP. These campaigns should be targeted at policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public.

3. Capacity building: Capacity building programs are needed to equip women and men with the skills and knowledge required to implement the RAP effectively.

4. Monitoring and evaluation: Regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the RAP is essential to ensure that the goals and targets are being achieved.

The implementation of the RAP requires a collaborative approach involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. By working together, we can ensure that women and girls are fully integrated into the peace and security processes and contribute to a more peaceful and secure future for our region.
The Challenge

South Pacific governments, organisations and political parties historically lack female representation, claiming that they cannot find the women. They claim that women do not present themselves for election or appointment or as candidates for public office, and that there is a lack of ‘suitable’ women for such nominations.

About the publication

In the FemLINKPACIFIC 2012 Policy for Peace in our Pacific Region report, Here are the Women, we identified some of the many intelligent, knowledgeable, principled, articulate, experienced, capable, committed women throughout the region who are dedicated to community development, gender equality, the elimination of violence and peace building. Yet in the preparation for the coming elections, our communities are still being told that women are not coming forward or presenting themselves as candidates or becoming active in political parties.

There are still barriers against women taking their places in the public domain -- some cultural, some subtle, some financial, and some practical. There is rhetoric but there is little real support to draw women into the political process, other than as voters for male candidates.

Again, in our 2013 Policy for Peace in our Pacific Region, we profile women who are already activists, working, speaking and leading in our communities with skills that can transfer to the wider public sphere if they are given the space. The women profiled in these pages already have proven capabilities, demonstrated through their activities with the femLINK-PACIFIC network in the three focus areas of the Regional Action Plan: gender mainstreaming and women’s leadership in conflict prevention and management, political decision-making, and peacebuilding and peacekeeping; gender mainstreaming and women’s participation in security sector oversight and accountability; and protection of women’s human rights in transitional and post-conflict contexts.

Enhancing Regional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

“There are many examples of the roles played by women in peace building processes across the Pacific. For example, in Fiji women have organized peace vigils, dialogue and provided technical inputs into defence reviews and national security policy development; negotiations across crocodile infested rivers with armed combatants and developing education methods for peace building in the Solomon Islands; actions to bring about the laying down of arms in Bougainville; advocacy, research and education to encourage voting in Marshall Islands; efforts in Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu and across the region to end violence against women. These are only a few examples of responses to conflict or perceived threats to human security that women’s organizations have developed and sustained over the years. Despite women’s productive efforts their participation in peace building, post-conflict recovery and efforts to enhance the oversight and accountability of the security sector is still a matter for debate. Women still struggle to be heard at the negotiating table in leadership roles and are not given sufficient recognition and resources to do their work.” (Pacific Regional Action Plan 2013 – 2015) Developing and strengthening “appropriate mechanisms to enhance the advancement of women at all levels” is the first strategic objective of the Pacific Platform for Action (2004 – 2015) and includes ensuring the availability and use of sex disaggregated data and gender analysis across all sectors, supporting policy development, government services, budgeting, monitoring and reporting processes, ensuring national laws and policies complying with CEDAW and enforcing gender equality and women’s human rights and effective partnership exists between the government and civil society organisations.

FemLINKPACIFIC’s strategy to collaborate with regional inter-government organisations in particular the Pacific Islands Forum and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, as well as UN counterparts since 2007 provided the evidence for a Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (RAP-WPS) which was launched on October 18, 2012. FemLINKPACIFIC’s engagement with the Pacific Islands Forum’s Regional Security Committee (FRSC) was simply a result of asking the question – if there is the UNSC in NY what is the mechanism in the Pacific? Subsequently Gender, Conflict, Peace and Security was brought to the attention of the FRSC through a high level workshop for officials in 2006 with outcomes and recommendations of the joint workshop were endorsed by the FRSC. In 2007 the collaboration progressed around the human security agenda and the first Track II dialogue was staged with FRSC officials in 2007. In 2008, linkages were made to the Security Sector Governance. The Pacific Islands Forum Honiara Declaration (1992) saw Forum Leaders adopt measures to address security concerns. The Biketawa Declaration (2000) provided an entry point to integrate gender into peacebuilding and peacemaking.

Formulating the Conflict Prevention and Human Security framework and the RAP-WPS, has demonstrated the potential for member states, CSOs and regional inter-governmental organisations to collectively identify broad priorities, initiate strategic actions, and determine responsibilities among different actors. It also ensures that Women, Peace and Security activities are not seen as standalone efforts but rather as an integral part of regional peace and security discussions, in line with regional efforts of promoting gender equality.

The RAP-WPS provides a broad framework at the regional level to assist Forum Members and Pacific Territories to accelerate implementation of existing international, regional and national commitments on women, peace and security and has been informed by women’s civil society activism and action, and reflects the growing recognition of the need to invest in women, peace and security. The development of the Regional Action Plan has also been a substantive step towards mainstreaming gender and bringing more women and young women into official peace and security processes at the regional level, as well as creating a supporting mechanism for regional and national efforts on Women, Peace and Security.

Even though it is a regional framework the RAP-WPS is closely connected to the promotion of peace and women’s political agency in terms of conflict prevention and management, mediation and dialogue from the local to the national level.

The RAP-WPS must:

- Facilitate the enabling environment we need to improve women and young women’s leadership in conflict prevention and management, peacekeeping, security policy decision-making
- Ensure women’s and girls’ human rights are protected and
- Strengthen civil society, women’s groups, including young women and gender equality advocates engagement with regional security and conflict prevention policy and decision-making

Recommendation:

(i) Reaffirm UN SCR 1325 as a guiding tool for enhancing women’s participation for prevention – for human security, human development and human rights
(ii) Ensure the mobilization of resources to strengthen and support regional and domestic efforts by women’s civil society networks working on peace and security
(iii) Support RIGO and CSO collaboration to review and amend regional mechanisms to promote the integration of UNSCR1325 and subsequent resolutions into regional and national security sector governance, peace and security processes
Focus Area 1: Gender mainstreaming and women and young women’s leadership in conflict prevention and management, political decision-making and peacebuilding and peacekeeping

What the Regional Action Plan says: Since 1992, women have represented fewer than three percent of mediators and eight percent of negotiators to major peace processes, numbers that have not markedly improved since the passage of UNSCR 1325 in 2000. In other regions, it has been shown that when women are included as meaningful participants and given leadership roles, they enhance the scope of peace agreements to include broader societal and development priorities and needs, which are vital to ensuring lasting peace and security.[1]

In the Pacific region, women and young women play an important role in brokering peace because they help to foster and maintain confidence and trust among the people and are able to address issues of concern to women and marginalized groups. Women and young women also have critical knowledge of impending instability and violence and actively report their concerns, despite at times threats to their personal security. Women and young women are active at the local level in terms of conflict prevention and management, mediation and dialogue, but it is not recognized and they do not receive enough support to participate in formal efforts at the regional or national level.

This is compounded by the low level of women’s political representation at all levels of political decision-making in the region. In this context, the focus area aims to achieve the following:

- Strengthened capacity and networking of women and young women leaders from government, civil society and private sector in mediation, dialogue, peace negotiations and constitutional reforms.
- Enhanced capacity of governments to adopt measures to increase women’s representation at all levels of leadership and decision-making.
- More effective participation of women leaders in the context of the Bikelawa Declaration and Good Office role of the Secretary-General of the Forum Secretariat.

Given the widespread involvement of Pacific Island Countries in the Regional Assistance Mission for Solomon Islands (RAMSI) and an increasing number of police, military and civilian personnel from the region participating in UN peacekeeping and peace support operations, the focus area aims to achieve the following:

- Women, Peace and Security commitments are reflected in participating country peacekeeping policies.

Who the women are and what they say:

**Tallie Hong** is from Tapurai village on the small island of Simbo in the Western Province of Solomon Islands. She is 24 years old, was educated to Fifth Form level in secondary school and works for the Provincial Press. For the past two years she has involved herself with community work on climate change and youth advocacy. She is an intending candidate in the Solomon Islands elections 2013.

Solomon Islands has been independent since 1978 and has so far had only two women parliamentarians and about six women provincial government members, one of whom, Rhoda Sikilabu, was deputy premier for a period. Tallie developed her interest in politics at an early age because of her admiration for her late father, who had passion and great love for their community. She is a member of the youth women in parliament group that supports young women in leadership. She expects to get their help on the technical side of election campaigning as well as their practical support and help to find funding.

“I told myself not to dream, but act. I saw the struggles of my community and decided to work for them. Some of the issues include the imbalance and inaccessibility of services and grants from the provincial government which are rightly theirs. You can see the confusion in people’s eyes about these things.”

“Women issues are also important in our and other communities. I want youth people to be more empowered, making sure school dropouts acquire basic training or push for rural training centres to get them involved in economic activities to give them incomes.”

“A major issue for women and children is the water supply, because women have to paddle or walk miles to get water. Women also need income generating projects such as bakeries and sale of crafts.”

“In 2007 my village was wiped out by a tsunami and I need to protect my people from climate disasters by having them relocated. As a leader I want to prepare a place for them if they want to move.”

Tallie advises other young people that when they have a passion to do something, don’t wait too long, or until you are mature, before you start. Do it.

**Nancy Jolo** is general secretary of the Development Services Exchange, the umbrella body for all NGOs in Solomon Islands. She previously headed the Solomon Islands Red Cross. Nancy is from Santa Isabel and is a single mother of three teenagers. She studied environmental health at the Fiji School of Medicine before serving in government for 12 years.

“In my work with Red Cross I saw young women holding high posts, which is not a surprise – it is about commitment, hard work, being visionary about yourself as a woman of Solomon Islands and how you can contribute to the nation. That was the drive behind me holding such a post. ” You also need an interest in learning as much as you possibly can and applying experiences elsewhere to your own situation.

“The challenge is when you are working amongst men and need to make quick decisions. In a disaster it is crucial that you be sharp and ready – be prepared. In leadership you also need balance, personally and professionally. Our personal priority is our family, a challenge for women especially single mothers. Family is also really important to give you support, and I have a great extended family who are always at my back.

“Networking is also important. Know your peer group and network and communicate with the right people, talk about the right things in which you want to be more productive. You want to know how to break through that brick wall of not making a difference. ’We need time management and self awareness about a strengths and weaknesses. Mentoring is important, using your strengths to support other women colleagues to come up to leadership level.”

“Women are good about being practical and serving others, but at times we need to be vocal, not just making a noise but in our actions. To bring about change, change has to start with ourselves. We need to be role models. Women need to encourage ourselves instead of trying to sabotage other women leaders. My mother was an inspiration as a woman leader, very outspoken, and I tried my best to be similar, working within her values. The most important thing is our spirituality, balancing what makes us a complete person. “We need to recognize which areas of responsibility we can take on best. There are certain roles that only men sit on, but women have the potential and we should prove ourselves. Move outside the box, don’t look ourselves in. It’s all about the dialogue, communication and having constructive ideas, talking so that people will see and say ‘she has potential’.”

“Give opportunities instead of discriminating amongst ourselves – that is why we don’t see a lot of women taking up leadership. We need to think how best to bring women forth.”
Arieta Naloqi, 60, field officer with Goldfoundation and former health worker with Red Cross, at Tavua, Fiji: Leaders of the future. Tavua needs a lot of women in action who should be given more opportunities because they can do so much. I started the business eight months ago. I haven’t done any business studies, I was a science student in secondary school but hairdressing was my interest and hobby. There are many challenges because Tavua is a small community and only a few want the services we provide. Pay days are the time when we are busy, other times we just have to cope. I do everything: ladies and men’s hair, nails, waxing and other beauty work because I am a cosmetologist. I do housecalls too. Most of my customers are pretty satisfied and those with hair problems can help guide as well.

School leavers who are staying home should not lose hope. When I finished my study programme I stayed home for three months with nothing to do before I came up with my business idea to open a salon. Don’t lose hope, everyone has a talent but you have to help yourself. You can start small, working from home.

I have issues with the town council about stray dogs and rubbish collection. Rubbish disposal is an important environmental issue. Tavua needs a lot of women in action who should be given more opportunities because they can be leaders of the future.

Cynthia Kumar, 20, businesswoman with her own hair salon in Tavua, Fiji: I started my business eight months ago. I haven’t done any business studies, I was a science student in secondary school but hairdressing was my interest and hobby. There are many challenges because Tavua is a small community and only a few want the services we provide. Pay days are the time when we are busy, other times we just have to cope. I do everything: ladies and men’s hair, nails, waxing and other beauty work because I am a cosmetologist. I do housecalls too. Most of my customers are pretty satisfied and those with hair problems can help guide as well.

School leavers who are staying home should not lose hope. When I finished my study programme I stayed home for three months with nothing to do before I came up with my business idea to open a salon. Don’t lose hope, everyone has a talent but you have to help yourself. You can start small, working from home. I used to work with Red Cross in the ante natal clinic, discussing health and women’s issues with pregnant women, family planning and personal hygiene, and also feeding their babies. Then I ran a stall in the market until Goldfoundation called me. Now I also travel around Fiji and run workshops talking about health issues and running small businesses to lift them out of poverty. I talk to women about the value and importance of breastfeeding because most of the young women don’t know why and nor do we. All we can do is to sit with them and give them a cup of tea just to comfort them. When we go and talk on their behalf we hear excuses that we know are not true because we have seen the circumstances they live in. We should be looking after our elderly people. Some of their issues are still pending but we encourage them to wait.

Arieta Naloqi, 60, field officer with Goldfoundation and former health worker with Red Cross, at Tavua, Fiji: “I get up at 4:30am and cook. My husband and elder daughter go to work, but my six year old I take to school and pick up afterwards. My concerns for her are that there are bad toilet facilities at the school and she won’t use them, the roads are bad with no footpaths so it is dangerous for our children, and the drains fill up but we cannot get anyone to talk to us about our drainage and road problems.

Good leaders listen to what people need, what their problems are, and be of service to the people. We have no such leaders here, we have only men on the Advisory Council and we need women who will listen. I think there should be both a man and a woman advisory councillors for our area. Before my time, nobody talked to us, we only know after marriage all the problems and differences between men and women. I am worried for my daughters, especially the one working in Suva, because violence in society seems to be increasing. As a mother I tell my daughters to speak openly. I give them freedom but tell them that it comes with responsibility, and that they must be wary and not go with strangers. My little one never goes anywhere without me. My advice to mothers is to be open, do not hide things from your daughters but talk in a good way, not frightened. Trust and support your daughters, don’t stop them or they will lie and still end up going where they want.

I live in a crisis such as a hurricane we need better information from authorities. Once we got a tsunami warning on the mobile phones, but the headteacher said to relax, school would finish at the normal time. We also need to make sure all families know where the evacuation centres are, nobody tells us where to go in a disaster.

For me, peace means no fighting. I want no violence, no robberies, just people living in peace.

Roshni Lata Prakash, treasurer of Akriti Mother’s Club at Vuci, Fiji, is married with two daughters. I work in Lautoka Hospital for an NGO, Empower Pacific, and also travel to Tavua Hospital, providing general counselling for patients in post natal and female wards to give them emotional and mental support, including discussing issues that they were going through when they were admitted. Sometimes it is to do with their work environment, what they are going through with financial issues, and some of them are just not coping with being in hospital and it causes them stress. I explain that being in hospital is not necessarily the end of their life. Sometimes they go through grief over a loss, and sometimes complex issues such as domestic violence or even just an argument with their mother in law. I help them see what they can do differently in addressing their issue, their confidence, enable them to see their own strength and capability to do things differently.

Empower Pacific also has a social welfare programme and income generating programme, and we take referrals from not just hospitals but prisons, business organisations and even schools. That is how we came into contact with Goldfoundation and this type of partnership and networking really helps us focus on the community. In a recent cyclone we were able to go into communities to provide counselling first aid and set up self help groups for women. These enable women to be aware of and find the kid of support they can have within themselves as a group, and that way they can bring about many changes for themselves. For instance today I talked to a group that has associated itself with Goldfoundation about stress, the things they can do differently and how to handle times of stress. Group counselling can bring about a stronger bond. Some of the women who are on disability, mothers with disabilities and children, elderly people sometimes become overwhelmed by some of the things they have gone through and become really emotional, but after that they have a sense of relief. It brings about a stage of calmness, a first step in feeling there is some hope for them. Counselling is not common knowledge in communities. There needs to be more because it gets people out of their boxes, makes them know they have choices and can make positive changes that may take a long time, but they have to start somewhere.

The challenge in counselling for me is language, because I speak only English, but I can get colleagues to come with me to speak other languages.

Ummad Mohammed, a former medical and welfare officer for Red Cross, now manager of a garment factory and president of Tavua Soccer Association in Tavua, Fiji: “I’ve been managing the garment factory for six years and before becoming soccer club president because no man took the post. I was vice president of the men’s club and president of the women’s club. I am getting a lot of support, including a transport sponsor to take the club to games and we are fundraising to put the team in camp. I am also a member of the Western Zone for women’s sports and I am thinking of stepping down because it will be too much to look after all. Any woman can run an association, I don’t think it is hard for women, whether or not they are educated. All women can take up leadership roles, anyone can become a leader.

When I was medical and social welfare officer for Red Cross Labasa Branch for more than 15 years I travelled around on a poverty alleviation project and built almost 300 houses and set up about 28 income generating projects. They involved distributing sewing machines, setting up fuel stations and providing a fishing boat. I really liked helping people. There were a few mentally ill people I used to go with Ministry of Health to bring them into hospital for the check-ups. I would give them a bath, clothes and food and would raise funds for helping 300 to 500 needy people in the area. In the end I got the Volunteer of the Year award. I think my luckiest person to be travelling around helping that many people.

I got involved with the Goldfoundation when my garment factory was asked to sponsor a entrant in the Gold Town Carnival queen competition. She won the crown and we got best float in the parade, and we collected the most money in the carnival. The garment factory is a family business, I am general manager and have 21 staff, all female. We sell only locally and are always busy. I organise my office in the morning, then go to the sports ground and organise the soccer team boys and check up on their training, and sometimes I go home, cook the dinner, then go back to the ground to give the boys their fares home, then I go home. Everything goes smoothly.

All women can do something to earn money, even at home, even girls and school leavers. You can earn money and keep busy.
As an advisory councilor, when the road is flooded I talk to the road supervisor, who comes and repairs it. When there is no water I call the District Officer and he sends water. During hurricane times each zone is given a generator so we can pump water from bore holes.

In a hurricane I was the first person to leave her house and run to the neighbour’s when my house blew away. When I went to the Village next morning, I saw people who didn’t have a house to stay in. I called the District Officer for water, food and generators. It was a very bad situation. People were picked up and could go to the evacuation centres where they were given clothes and food. Goldfoundation helped with that and with containers and tarpaulins. Goldfoundation has helped many women’s clubs with small business, including poultry and bee farming.

A challenge is that in older times, women were not allowed to go anywhere without asking their husband or mother in law, but nowadays they can go. So I challenge every woman to take part in parties like the Advisory Council or any place because we want 50-50 women and men to have equal rights and equal say. Women can become justice of the Peace, Commissioner of Oaths and District Officers, and women can do things men can’t do.

Bal Sudha works in the Agriculture Department and is president of Dorcas Women’s Club, assistant president of Tavao Red Cross and treasurer of the Sanatan Nari Sabha, Tavua, Fiji: “With the Red Cross work I do field surveys after hurricanes and distribute relief packs to vulnerable people, and also run blood donor drives and fund raising efforts. I believe that behind every successful man there is a woman, and without men’s support women cannot do much. My husband is very supportive, and every man should look after their family well and help their women to come out and take a leadership role. Women also should support each other and know that anyone can take a leadership role. In the Dorcas club, we do sewing on order and we have training and workshops to learn about self defense and child abuse, to learn how to make a safe home. Life is very challenging, women need to come out in the open and join other women to learn more from them.

Rhodes Bangi, Papua New Guinea: “Tanku and good morning tru long you. I have three sons and we have been at the Pacific Theological College in Fiji while my husband Jack completes his Master of Theology programme. In Papua New Guinea women do not have many chances to share about their life, their work and experiences. Most do not have good education and most work as farmers, go fishing and look after children. Coming to PTC was a big challenge for me as I only speak and write Pisin English, but I got the chance to attend classes and learn plenty things again. I feel positive and confident to go back and help the women in my country and I will be working. My experience at PTC has confirmed my faith in God, with his help I will be confident. If women are faithful to our calling to give life, unity and peace amongst families and people we will glorify our Creator.”

Marion Kapu, Solomon Islands: “Good fala morning. I am from Isabel Prince and am in Fiji studying with my husband at Pacific Theological College. We were in a very remote parish where there was no school, no clinic and no form of communication. Life for women was very difficult, mothers stayed home and tried to find enough food for the families to survive. There was a lack of education because the villages are so far from urban centres. One thing is that the mother’s are committed and united in church activities, and this encouraged me not to give up as a young, inexperienced wife of the priest but to do my best supporting my husband’s work.”

Elsie Balq, Solomon Islands: “This is the second time I have come with my husband to the Pacific Theological College in Fiji. The first time I felt I was nobody, but I was encouraged by my sisters here and graduated with certificates in women’s studies and theology. When we went back to the Solomon Islands I worked with both women who had never been to school and some with higher qualifications than I had. Whatever your qualifications, you are precious to God, never think you are nobody.”

Vikastoria Nabuka, of Taveuni, Fiji: “I am married with three children and love the huge responsibility that I have as a housewife. I previously taught electrical engineering at the technical college and my husband worked for government. None of our children had started school then and when I would work late in the evenings it put a lot of stress on the family and I thought my children were missing parental guidance. We made a conscious decision then that I stay at home and look after them, and my husband would be able to support us better. I never regretted this decision and turned down other formal employment opportunities. My children are now in primary school and I still want to be with them. I now have the time and urge to pursue knowledge and am at Pacific Theological College because of my interest not only in building up my faith, but gaining knowledge about the church and the Bible.”

Asenate Navunisaravi, yacona seller, Suva Market, Fiji: “I am in charge of the food expenses at home, from when I was young, and for paying for the kava stall at $121.50 a week. I try my best to pay because this is my source of income for the family. Women must stand up and make a difference in their life. If you are at home it is always nice to help your husband, maybe with some small business or something to help. We can help buy things for the family, take some of the expenses and bills and make a difference in our lives.”

Minima Kuru, Suva Market, Fiji: “I am from Ra and I run the Seventh Day Adventist Dorcas women’s stall. I sew organization uniforms and for others who come and ask, including patching clothes, and also sew bags and do screen printing. I come at 7am and close at 5pm. I find the new e-ticketing on the buses is hard because the drivers don’t give us the change and we have to top up the card all the time, and there is no top up available in our village. We have to come into town. Here and in the village I see a lot of people struggling, plenty people come just to borrow money like $2 or $1 or 50 cents. I pay to the church and for my stall and can still make a profit. I challenge women to make a difference in their lives and help their family and themselves with whatever business they can do. Make use of what God has given us to make a change in our lives in and in society.”

Anshoo Rakesh, Association of Anglican Women, Labasa, Fiji: My first priority is to involve more women in women’s activities. A priority of our association is for women to take part in decision making, but if they take this role they should reach right to the grass roots.

Jotivini, 3B, Nagai Women’s Group, Labasa, Fiji: More women should take part in decision making because they understand the family better than men and they make wise and active decisions.

Nirmala Sharma of the Vunicuicui Multiracial Women’s Forum, Labasa, Fiji: “We need to have awareness programmes for women because most of them rely only on their husbands, they only stay in the house and are not going out of the house because they don’t know their rights. We need awareness of gender equality and our securities so women get some ideas, especially for those staying in the house, depending on their husband.

Mereani (surname), 34, president of Wasavulu Women’s Club, Labasa, Fiji, is concerned about encouraging women to participate in activities leading to more involvement with community action and decision making.

“We should set an example of good leadership by having faith in ourselves and being prepared to listen to group members with understanding. But women are not being given leadership opportunities at leadership at community, local and national level because men don’t want to give us a chance, they want to be on the top layers. I would like to see more fairness and equality.”

“At the 9th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women in 2004, ministers, government officials and civil society representatives recognized peace and security as critical issues and added it to the Pacific Platform of Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005 – 2015. The conference called on governments to: “implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which provides a comprehensive framework for the promotion and support of the protection of women and their role in peacebuilding at all levels of our society right from the family unit; recognise and enhance women’s inclusion in early warning systems, conflict prevention and peace processes and negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction; make use of regional and international organisations to conduct gender sensitivity training for peacekeepers so as to ensure they are sensitive to issues on the ground; utilize the provisions under the Biketawa Declaration to proactively monitor national security situations with the view to averting potential conflicts and resolving possible conflicts by peaceful means;” (Pacific Platform of Action for Gender Equality)
Communicating our Priorities for Peace and Security: The Role of Women’s Radio

Labasa, Fiji: Voxpop session on networking by community radio

Buna: “I like to hear women's stories and listen to their issues.”

Dibose: “Women can hear problems faced by other women and they can give their opinions.”

Pei: “It is important to the people to hear the voices of women, the ones who need help from others.”

“By listening to the radio we hear the news and become aware of what is happening around us.”

“The importance of community radio is to know what is happening around us and around Fiji.”

“By listening to community radio we are listening to the women.”

“We hear that problems being faced by women around the world are also here.”

“It helps a lot to learn new things.”

“It brings women from different ethnicities and denominations together and they can share their problems and find solutions.”

Linking to the UN-CSW campaign as well as International Women’s Day FemLINKPACIFIC collaborated with 30 women brought together through our Naucori “100" network to identify practical strategies to prevent violence against women and girls and enhance a culture of peace and security. Collectively the women spoke about the right of women and children to live a life free of violence and that the prevention of violence needs economic security in our homes and husbands and wives are making financial decisions, our income and expenses together. Participants also highlighted that prevention of violence also needs men and women sharing in decision making in our community, our town and also in our country. The participatory approach extended to also involving the women recording their audio tracks for the Hindi and Taulake language scripts.

The radio campaign highlighted the role of women’s rights groups and networks such as FemLINKPACIFIC in enhancing efforts to prevent all forms of violence requires the full implementation of key global commitments to women’s human security and human rights including CEDAW, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the MDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action. Prevention strategies must include investing in women’s peace and security by ensuring women can inform and influence decisions which affect their lives including through equal participation in local and national governance. The efforts of community based women’s movements must also be recognised and supported to bring about long term prevention and social transformation so that all women and girls can claim their right to peace and security.

Po Lino Fong is FemLINKPACIFIC’s correspondent and convenor based in Naucori, Fiji, who hosts the monthly 1325 Naucori Network Meetings. Focusing on Women, Peace and Human Security. The 3rd Wednesday of every month brings together representatives of 12 women’s organisations in the area who travelled up to an hour by bus or boat.

Lalita: “I didn’t know about rights until I came into this network, we need to stop this violence and make women strong and not afraid.”

Salo: “Living with the extended family including seven brothers and four married is hard. This is my safe space to share. I want all women to know their rights and share experiences to empower ourselves.”

Salini: “I encouraged my sister to get help and her husband spent two days in a cell at the police station. Now husband and wife and family are together. I say enough is enough, I know my rights and am respected.”

Salote: “My husband left me with four daughters six years ago. I am a market vendor and proud to be in this network. I have an idea, why don’t we all come together to the market because there are a lot of women vendors and the women from the women’s groups could light candles to show our solidarity against violence, that we say no to violence."

Saleshe: “There is a need to tell each other that it is okay to talk about what we are going through, and a need for justice to be done in a quick way so the victim is not afraid.”

Focus Area 2: Gender mainstreaming and women and young women’s participation in security sector oversight and accountability

SvCR 1325 reaffirms that women are crucial partners in brokering the three pillars of lasting peace: economic recovery, social cohesion and political system. But our political reality is that we still have a long way to go to be able to claim spaces in a legitimate political system, even to simply challenge spending priorities by the state. By using women’s media, local women are empowered via the dissemination and control of information while listening women are connected to the same information.

The 2012 theme of UN Security Council Open Debate on SCR 1325 reiterated the need to support women’s civil society roles in peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and that means that local and national action plans must be inclusive of women’s definitions of peace and human security. It also requires a transformation of structures to ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making.

However, even before the adoption of the groundbreaking security council resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) on October 9th 2000 Pacific women have actively campaigned for accountable and participatory security sector, which responds to the specific needs of men, women, girls and boys. And despite their traditional marginalization from decision-making structures, women have been instrumental in brokering peace during the crises in Bougainville, Solomon Islands, and Fiji, and continue to play a vital role in peace-building. In particular, through advocacy and awareness-raising, women’s organizations advise and inform security policy makers as well as the general public on issues related to gender and security.

These initiatives have included:

- initiation and leadership of the anti nuclear movement in the Pacific
- negotiating across the crossfire in Bougainville, Solomon Islands
- participating in weapons disposal programmes in particular in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands
- peace interventions and mediation in particular during the political and armed conflict in Fiji in 2000
- undertaking pre-deployment training of military and police personnel in particular on human rights standards and practices providing trauma counselling

Women and civil society groups also commemorate the UN International Day of Peace as well as the International Women’s Day for Peace and Disarmament.

Unfortunately much of these efforts have been outside of the radar of official peace and security policy spaces and were not for the support and partnership with international development partners and agencies, which have either documented themselves or supported women’s documentation of their peace initiatives much of this work would remain be invisible.

What the Regional Action Plan says:

From 27 – 30 April 2009, UNDP and PIFS hosted a Regional Security Sector Governance Conference in Nuku’alofa, Kingdom of Tonga. Pacific Island Countries identified the importance of gender mainstreaming in the security sector (military, police, correctional services, immigration and judiciary) and increased women’s participation in regional and national security sector decision-making, oversight and accountability mechanisms. [3] Following that workshop the FRSC mandated PIFS and UNDP to support efforts in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to develop comprehensive national security policies. In this context, the focus area aims to achieve the following:

- Women, Peace and Security commitments and obligations incorporated in the development and implementation of national security, defence and justice policy.
- The nature of security threats and the agenda of the FRSC over the last decade have changed significantly. For example at the 2011 meeting the FRSC discussed issues such as transnational organised crime; small arms and light weapons proliferation and arms trade treaty negotiations; unexploded ordinance; strategic law enforcement challenges in the context of police, customs, immigration, fisheries and maritime; criminal deportees; security sector governance; counter-terrorism; border security and management; conflict prevention and management of political crises; SGBV and. Women, Peace and
and Security. The experience gained in PNG may be utilized to assist other Pacific Island Countries to integrate the RAP into the Reference Group and the Government of PNG (GoPNG) to develop and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security especially in the context of PNG. That may further provide an opportunity for the implementation of PNG’s NSP in 2014 will provide a convenient avenue to integrate and implement the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security especially in the context of PNG. That may further provide an opportunity for the Reference Group and the Government of PNG (GoPNG) to develop and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. The experience gained in PNG may be utilized to assist other Pacific Island Countries to integrate the RAP into their national plans and strategic development frameworks.

In 2013 as a result of the Regional Action Plan, work has progressed on formulating Papua New Guinea’s first National Security Policy (PNG NSP). The policy formulation process commenced in July 2012. Issues of Gender, Women, Peace and Security (UN Security Council Resolution 1325) are prominently featured in the NSP. The focus of security has shifted from state centred to human centred security, hence the final product (PNG NSP) will incorporate the views, threats, security challenges and the security needs of our people (girls, boys, youths, women, men and people with special needs) and how the state through the NSP intends to deal with those threats and challenges. It is envisaged that the NSP once finalized and launched towards the end of this year will be useful for the PIF Reference Group on Women, Peace and Security. Additionally the implementation of PNG NSP in 2014 will provide a common avenue to integrate and implement the Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security especially in the context of PNG. That may further provide an opportunity for the Reference Group and the Government of PNG (GoPNG) to develop and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. The experience gained in PNG may be utilized to assist other Pacific Island Countries to integrate the RAP into their national plans and strategic development frameworks.

Lidia Waiqiccalini, 58, leader of the peace building and security sector for Women in Peace with the Catholic Women’s League in Nausori, Fiji, is a widow with eight children and six grandchildren, and has retired after a career in the government health service. “We face a lot with the town planners and town council. We need roads to be repaired, street lights fixed and more lights have been requested by a group of women I was helping with sorting out their water and sewage bills. When the roads are bad women cannot take their vegetables and other products to market because the buses stop running. The flood prone areas where we are encouraging women to do back yard gardening to put food on the table need drainage work done. FemLINKPACIFIC brought that the town planners and CEG to a workshop that gave us an opportunity to talk about the importance of roads and lights for us, and they have been doing some repair and installing new power posts. I try to live up to my ideals of a leader as a good decision maker, a person who can foresee what is coming and is there to meet the challenges, someone to solve problems and who is faithful. I have been urging other women to be included in their village meetings and in roles men have been taking, to help the men and make the voices of the women heard. I have seen a difference, of women taking up leadership roles.

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The sort of barriers women have to break is the culture that women always look up to men and that their job is always to be in the home. There are always going out getting the fishing, then the washing while the caregivers, while the men are always waiting and going out in their own time. While women are in the kitchen and men are out, who is looking after the children? We are hearing a lot about rapes of girls and little children. We need to have time with our children, when they come from school to sit down and have a little talk, talk about school, if they are having any problems, and know their whereabouts every day. Everyone needs to be partners in helping take care of the children.

The community radio is very good for spreading ideas and I would like to have our own here, to hear a lot more about women empowering themselves, like selling food wraps in the market.

I would also like special disaster centres to be set up for times of hurricanes and floods, now we shelter in schools and they are not prepared for this. I would like to see a centre where women could look after women and their special needs, such as when they are pregnant or have their menses.

Peace for me means security for women and girls. I can share my peace with others by coming to monthly FemLINKPACIFIC meeting where we can share with each other, information and skills. I want to see everyone in Fiji living in peace and harmony so we can build a better Fiji.

Uttra Singh, 73, Namoua Women’s Fellowship Group, Ba, Fiji: “Health security is very important as we get older and tend to need medication for various sicknesses. Some of the medicine is not available at the government hospital. Regarding food security, we don’t buy clothes and other things every day but we all need food and it becomes very hard in a big family with only one income earner. Things in the market are expensive and you have to buy wisely. I used to be very happy with the food vouchers the government distributed. It was a big help to me. I could get basic food items. Now they have been stopped and we are going to get money, but I prefer the food vouchers. Sometimes it is hard to see the difference between the new $1 and $2 coins, especially if you have weak eyesight. The other day in the market I paid $2 for something selling for $1 and it was only that the lady was very honest and gave me the change when I came back from buying other things. There is confusion with the new money.

I live on my own in a small house and have maintenance and other small things to do. So many people live on their own and it is important to feel secure in our own houses and communities. I get on well with my neighbours but I get scared sometimes, you hear so much about women being attacked and the attackers don’t see if you are young or old or a child. We have a police post in the community but the police should be visiting all the households and policing the community. Sometimes we go to the police post and nobody is there. I have the emergency phone numbers written on my wall.

Kasanita, 61, president of Korobaqa women’s club, Ba, Fiji: “Most of us women don’t work, we stay in the village. Most go into the mangroves to catch crabs and sell them on the road. It is the main source of income. Myself and my daughter in law have a vegetable garden but we don’t sell in the market, we sell here in the village. The main issue is sending our children to school, some have problems paying the fees and the children come back from school because we can’t pay. In the rainy season they stay home because of the road condition. We have brought this up with the District Officer to get the Public Works Department to help, and I hear the Fiji Sugar Corporation access road is being taken care of.

In my village the women own about 10 acres of land. We used to plant sugar cane there when my mother in law, who was the president when she was alive, used to have a half share basis farm. But when she died my brother in law took over and he chased the farming family out of there, so now that land is lying idle. I want to establish a small sugar cane farm and have the lease title. We are planning their own root crops and vegetables. 
Anshu, 31, Association of Anglican Women, Labasa, Fiji:

Women are lost, they know this and that have to be done, but don’t know in which way or how to go about it. Women haven’t seen women’s rights people working here and talking about rights, which would be good, because most of the buy from the pharmacy, which some can’t afford. Sometimes they use herbal medicine, but it is not like getting the tablets.

Seniana, 50, project leader and field officer and Alesi Siga, treasurer of the Multiracial Women’s Cooperative Ltd at Ba Village, Fiji:

The canteen project is going well and women are putting in an effort. The challenge is to get the women to can be $10 - $20 month. The cost of living is expensive. They have to pay the rent of $25 month for a new house or $5-7 for the older ones, plus electricity and water that can be $10 - $20 month. The living cost is expensive.

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Sometimes when women go to the hospital they don’t have the medicine to give us so we have to take a prescription and buy from the pharmacy, which some can’t afford. Sometimes they use herbal medicine, but it is not like getting the tablets from the hospital.

Most of the women living in the village are aware of their rights but they don’t have the guts to act on their own rights. I haven’t seen women’s rights people working here and talking about rights, which would be good, because most of the women are lost, they know this and that have to be done, but don’t know in which way or how to go about it. Women should be involved in decision making, most have good talents.

Human security has many facets, including economic security and food security.

Anshu, 31, Association of Anglican Women, Labasa, Fiji: Grow your own vegetables and sell the surplus rather than going to the market and buying.

Jotivini, 38, Naqai Women’s Group, Labasa, Fiji: Women can take part in running a small business in their own homes. Lusiana, 52, Vatulutu Women’s Group, Labasa, Fiji: To prevent violence we should educate and watch our children every day, and have police posts in the villages.

Rufina Ratulelo, 39, Bulileka Young Women and Women’s Club, Labasa, Fiji: In most villages I have encountered all our turaga ni koro (village head man) are male, the change I need to see is to include some women as turaga ni koro because they are the ones who carry most of the burden in a village at family level, and they are aware of or understand the needs of each village.

Adi Makitalena, 52, president of Naileba Multiracial Women’s Group, Labasa, Fiji: My main priority is water. Women should take part as advisory councillors for community development, they know what is needed. There needs to be good shelter for vendors selling outside the market for their economic security.

Asenaca, 54, president of Vunicuicui Multiracial Women’s Forum, Labasa, Fiji: Some women could take up the position of marama ni koro (village head woman) because now they take their issues to the turaga ni koro (village head man) and it ends there, not taken to another level.

Mereani, 34, president of Wasavulu Women’s Club, Labasa, Fiji: In the floods and hurricane our food crops were damaged and children couldn’t go to school, particularly the girls, because the road to the village is in such bad condition. During the hurricane the whole village had to shelter in the hall and I was concerned that girls were being persuaded by men who raped them.

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Laisa, mother of a one year old child and working from her home in Lami, Fiji: ‘I sell in the market from 7am to 6pm and I get enough to feed my family, and it is not a hard job. Women staying at home now could do this.

Makereta, market vendor, Fiji: ‘It takes an hour and 15 minutes by bus to get to the market, and I am always there ten minutes before it opens at 7am. I buy from farms and some imported things and sell. If we give good service and sell good stuff the customers come back, but we don’t make much profit. Some of our issues in the market are people stealing our stuff when it is delivered and left outside, it gets sold to someone else. We have to watch over our things. The market is a good place, you don’t have to stop working when you reach a certain age and you can see things and meet other people. One woman was selling her last year and she was 98. The market is for everyone.

Laisa, mother of a one year old child and working from her home in Lami, Fiji: ‘My husband was the only one working, as a taxi driver, when my mother and a nephew came to live with us. My husband gave $150 a week to his parents, who owned the taxi, and we lived on what was left. I decided to help him earn money, and started off selling iceblocks. With money saved from that I ventured into selling kava and can make about $110 profit a month. As time went by, I could afford a washing machine and a DVD player. Now I also take orders for pies and cakes, to make more money. Because everything today costs money, we owe it to ourselves to earn money. Money influences people and relationships. Before I started earning, when my husband would not buy things I wanted I would get upset and skip meals, and sometimes I experienced physical violence. Now my husband has changed for the better. Every week we sit and count the money we have earned, and plan to buy our own taxi.

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“In the Pacific region, women and young women play an important role in brokering peace because they help to foster and maintain confidence and trust among the people and are able to address issues of concern to women and marginalized groups. Women and young women also have critical knowledge of impending instability and violence and actively report their concerns, despite at times threats to their personal security. Women and young women are active at the local level in terms of conflict prevention and management, mediation and dialogue, but it is not recognized and they do not receive enough support to participate in formal efforts at the regional or national level. This is compounded by the low level of women’s political representation at all levels of political decision-making in the region.” (Pacific Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security)

Focus Area 3: Protection of women’s and girls’ human rights during humanitarian crises and in transitional and post-conflict contexts

In 2010 the Forum Regional Security Committee welcomed the United Nations General Assembly resolution A/Res/63/281 entitled ‘Climate Change and its Possible Security Implications’ and the subsequent UN Secretary General’s report on the issue. The Forum Secretariat coordinated the compilation of a joint Pacific regional submission in response to the report from relevant CROP agencies. In 2012 the Committee expressed support for the Forum Secretariat’s work on climate change induced migration and security issues in the region.

What the Regional Action Plan says: At their 2009 meeting, Leaders’ recognized sexual and gender-based violence was a risk to human security and a potential destabilizing factor for communities and societies alike; acknowledged that SGBV remained pervasive across the Pacific and; urged the recognition of its prevalence in the Pacific at all levels of community, whether in the domestic context or during natural disasters, conflict and post-conflict situations. Leaders’ mandated the Secretariat and Forum members at the highest level, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, to raise awareness of the serious risk of sexual and gender-based violence at its impact on the Pacific and; to establish firmly on the political agendas of Forum members the issue of SGBV. Leaders’ also committed to eradicating SGBV and ensure all individuals have equal protection of the law and equal access to justice. Subsequently, in November 2010 a Pacific Islands Forum Reference Group to Address SGBV was established. Members include senior government officials from Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tonga, SPC, UN Women and Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre. The RAP has been developed with significant inputs from members of SGBV Reference Group. The Regional Action Plan compliments the work of the SGBV Reference Group by focusing on achieving the following in the context of Women, Peace and Security:

- Ending Violence against Women (EVAW) policies ensure women and girls’ access to health, psychosocial, legal and protection in times of humanitarian emergency and in reconstruction and rehabilitation after conflict and crisis.

The UN CEDAW Committee has begun the process of developing a general recommendation on women in conflict and post-conflict situations. The primary purpose of the General Recommendation is to provide guidance to State parties on the legislative, policy and other appropriate measures to ensure full compliance with their Convention obligations to protect, respect and fulfill women’s human rights during times of armed conflict and in all peace-building processes, which includes the immediate aftermath of conflict and long term post-conflict reconstruction. In March 2012, the CEDAW Committee held an Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation to provide inputs on the development of the general recommendation. In this context, the focus area will aim to achieve the following:

- State parties are better able to meet their obligations to protect, respect and fulfill women’s and girls’ human rights during transitional, conflict and post-conflict situations.
Sivane Drauna, 42, president of the Catholic Women’s League, Vanuamo, Fiji, married and mother of two children.

“Issues we face in our communities include early school dropouts due to lack of support from parents, teenage pregnancy linked to urban drift, and lack of healthy living causing sudden deaths in people in their 30s and 40s. We need awareness programmes in the village, develop vocational schools, and encourage parents to spend more time with their children. We can deal with the health problem by encouraging people to plant gardens and eat more vegetables, and do more exercise.

“A good leader shows by example, by their behavior, such as putting their head down and working and talking later. Women are not given leadership opportunities in organisations such as the advisory councils – there is only one woman in the whole of this sector. The tradition lingers on that women stay home to do the housework and look after the children.

“In disasters in my area there is nowhere for people to go, more needs to be done. We also need awareness programmes throughout the communities about how to control violence against women and girls. Anger management programmes should be run for some men. I want fair treatment for women and men.

Pushpa Manu, 46, president of the Akriti Mothers Group, Fiji, trained in business management and worked in a life insurance company, and later taught English. As club leader she has a focus on girls and women but values the engagement with femLINKPACIFIC as an opportunity to learn more and transmit information to her community.

“Our members bring the girls and the boys too during the holidays, and we have regular elections. I think being a good leader involves being honest and having faith in your members so that they can have faith in you.

“I don’t think women in our area are given enough opportunities for leadership. There is only one woman on the local advisory council. We need more women that we can talk to and who can be better informed about our issues at meetings. Men think they are the leaders, but if they shared with women it would be easier for us all to work together.

“Concerning the safety of women and children, I would like to see someone from the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre or a counselor to talk to school children, especially in primary schools, at least once a term, so that they learn from a young age how to respect women.

“Some of the issues most concerning women in my area include drainage problems and street lighting near the shops. We also need to be better prepared for hurricane season, and make sure people know where the health centre is. We definitely need more women to help in the disaster evacuation centres too.

“My vision is to see women develop leadership, get into the advisory committee and then the council and stand for parliament, and we can say yes, we are women.

Gyan Mati, 70, of Sarava, Ba:

“When my husband passed away, I was on my own. A few men from the village were harassing me, when they were drunk they would come and pass remarks. This made me very uncomfortable. I called the police from the nearest police post, but still they wouldn’t listen. I got frightened and had sleepless nights. One night I called my brother at 2am and told him to come and clear the farm behind my place, it looked like a jungle. He cleared it up and now I grow vegetables to eat and to sell on the roadside. I keep the land clear with a brushcutter I can use myself. I offered space on my land to the police so they could build a police post there, but they didn’t.

Since I have been attending the femLINKPACIFIC monthly programme I have learnt about my rights, what to do and who I can consult. There is someone there to listen. When I come to sessions I feel fresh. Women should be proud of who they are. I was always encouraged to participate in marches and also learnt karate to defend myself. There is nothing bigger than peace, whether it is a man or woman, peace is important in a family. Respect everyone.

Karalaini Naitito, 40, President of Balata Multiracial Women’s Club, Tavua, Fiji:

“We have meetings and discussion on Mondays, but some women are not allowed to come from their homes because of culture and religious belief, it’s a big problem, so I try to visit them and tell them about what we have discussed. The WAPA Women’s Group helps us with some programmes, for instance last year the club wanted to learn about baking, and they sent a person to run workshop and give advice. I want to have workshops to help women understand some of the social issues going on around them, and how they can solve them. We are also more empowered. I have been to training and programmes on women, peace and development and I inform the women in my group about what I learn. I want to tell women to all come together to look after those who need help, look after each other.

Police Sergeant Ilisoni Sauraudu: “The crime rate has gone down. Policing isn’t just for the police, it is for everyone.”

Arisi Kaitani, president of the crime prevention group:

“I am president of the group. An aim is to have everyone in the village home by 6pm, visitors to leave by 8pm, and in bed by 9pm for school students. We have a primary school built here and it is for children’s own benefit to go to school every day. We monitor school leavers and work to prevent the breaking of minor rules and such things as glue sniffing, smoking marijuana and drinking home brew and other alcohol in the village. This is for the safety of children and their mothers.”

Mere Mataysava, secretary of the crime prevention committee: “Our aim is to ensure safety and prevent children from breaking the law at a young age. We want to encourage children to make a stand for themselves and not be easily persuaded by other people. We record the complaints that tenants make. We solve the ones we can, such as stolen root crops being sold by young boys, which we avoid buying. The complaints are discussed by the committee and taken by the president to the Nakasi police station.

Lusi, a member of the crime prevention committee: “When we used to complain to the police they didn’t take action, but the crime prevention committee makes sure action is taken and there is feedback from the police station.

Lusiana, 52, Vatulutu Women’s Group, Labasa, Fiji: Women may still be unable to report cases of violence because the culture doesn’t enable them to talk straight to someone, and they may be afraid or feel shy because they don’t speak English well, so they cannot force themselves to report something no matter what they are facing.

Anshu, 31, Association of Anglican Women, Labasa, Fiji: Women must think of their children and that their husband may chase them away when they don’t have anywhere else to go. If they report to the police they are asked a lot of questions, some they can’t answer perhaps because they are shy or some other reason. Sometimes they are not educated and can’t think of going to their problems. There should be a police post in the community, or we need a community leader to help and a counselling team available, rather than calling the police in the town where they take time to come because they don’t have a vehicle or something like that.

Rufina Ratulelo, 39, Bilileka Young Women and Women’s Club, Labasa, Fiji: Most women do not know their rights and that is why they are frightened to report violence cases. They are also frightened of being blamed for causing the violence because they see the real perpetrators are often a trusted person in the family. It is also a cultural tradition that we are concerned about a relative’s security rather than voicing our own concern. There needs to be an awareness campaign to make women understand their rights and how to follow if they encounter violence in their lives. Survivors need counsellors who understand them so they can return and be accepted into the community.

Development also brings all sorts of violence and there should be police posts allocated all around in development areas, and also awareness programmes about what violence is and what sorts there are so people can eliminate it. We also need family awareness programmes because peace in the home leads to peace in the world. We need parents to be able to give their children good advice, to be aware of what is happening around them and help their children make the right decisions.

Adj. Maktalea, 62, president and Naleba Multiracial Women’s Group, Labasa, Fiji: Women don’t trust people they are going to report violence to and are frightened to speak out because it could be they are close relatives. We need a medical service in our community for survivors.

Asenaca, 54, president of Vunucucul Multiracial Women’s Forum, Labasa, Fiji: People need to learn what they can do if something happens. Parents need to talk straight and openly to their children.

Lita of the Bilileka Women’s and Young Women’s Group: “Some women are frightened of reporting violence because of what their husbands will do to them, that’s why they hold back. There should be equal treatment between both men and women, and there should be togetherness that includes children. People should work together and have the right motives.

Nirmala S of the Vunucucul Multiracial Women’s Forum: “Women don’t know their rights and are much afraid of the family, especially the in-laws or the husband. The husband sometimes says that if they report it to the police, he will leave them if they survive by yourself. Who will look after you, nobody will want you. They are ashamed that the community will laugh at them. We need a health centre and a police post, and an evacuation centre for surrounding communities during hurricanes and until people can repair their homes. When people are relying on their relatives to look after them when their houses blow down, there is gossiping.

Amalane Mate, leader of the Nakalelo Assembled of God Women’s Group, Fiji, is married to a pastor and has five sons and one daughter: “We have meetings in the village every Friday, the village, health and finance meetings. The village leaders have chosen one woman to be on each committee, along with six or seven men. There is a disaster centre in the village for times of hurricanes, a double story building. Women are organized into groups who deal with health and food, which is different from other disaster centres where men are in charge and women have to ask them for everything.

“I am also concerned about the environmental damage being caused by big vessels on the river, that spill oil, cause pollution, kill fish and crabs, and cause erosion of the banks. I want the pollution stopped because we depend on the river for our family food. I want the roads to be repaired so transport is better and more available.

“Women and girls are victims of ongoing domestic violence and as a leader I would like to counsel them and see if they could live more peacefully and have more time for their children.”
Bhima Wati, Nausori Market, Fiji: “People are coming into the towns more and there is not much farming done in the villages, own plantation and will sell that and not have to buy from other farmers. asked if I would like to take the table. I don’t think the quality of food has decreased, but prices have gone up and there is a “My mother had the stall for 20 years and when she decided to retire four years ago she brought it over from Monrovia organized by the Bowe Peace Foundation. I sit in on the classes so I can better monitor the Pacific women. For many, peace is absence of violent conflict, but for me in the Fiji context it means a people centred development, and to agree t disagree without being violent, taking over homes and government. I look forward to that day. I grew up in the coup culture, and remember as a class one student seeing men with guns and a general climate of fear. Now I am older and the kids are growing up across racial barriers, it has made me think of when they are unsure. It isn’t easy to work for institutions that are the socalled perpetrators of the violence, you have to defend your presence in the institution. But when things cross the line you have to make a decision, one you shouldn’t have to make as a Fijian citizen. These are the kind of things I would think about if I were a leader. I see my role has helping people make sense of their realities and making them fit their ideologies into something Fijian can use to build itself into in future. When everyone else gives up, mothers will stand, and daughters should not give up. As mothers we must make decisions about how we protect our children as they grow up in this climate, reinforcing messages of non violence and racial tolerance and working on how to encourage them to interact with other people, to offer trust and forgive. We are responsible for our children becoming leaders.”

Pasemaca, of Wainibuku, Fiji: “When I work overtime I have to wait on the main road and wait for other people who live in Wainibuku so we can put in for a van fare to take us home. The last bus is at 6.30pm and the road is a narrow dirt road full of potholes. There are no lights on the road. The condition of the bus is bad because of the bad road. Sometimes it can break down three or four times a day. We really need a better bus and one that will come later at night for people who work late.”

Penina, Wainibuku, Fiji: “I thank the bus company for running buses every two hours, but sometimes it breaks down and we have to wait for another one. When it is dark I have to walk by myself from the main road, I have to be fast, and when there is no moon that’s when we really need lights. I have arthritis in my knee.”

Nisha, Wainibuku, Fiji: “When there is heavy rain the road conditions are so very bad sometimes we have to walk halfway to the main road to catch the bus, or walk for an hour to the main road because it won’t come on the bad road. I go to school and I am lucky that class finishes early and I can catch the 6.30pm bus, but on Thursday I finish at 10pm and there is no bus, so I have to walk right from the main road.”

Klera, single mother at Wainibuku Hart village, Fiji: “I have to end my three children to school, including my daughter who goes to Hilton Special School (for disabled children) and they have to catch the bus. When it doesn’t come I have to take her to the main road. We need the road condition improved so the bus can come.”

Ana Rolovui, Nausori Market, Fiji: “My mother had the stall for 20 years and when she decided to retire four years ago she asked if I would like to take the table. I don’t think the quality of food has decreased, but prices have gone up and there is a lot more competition now, more people selling food. I am planting my vegetables this y ear, so hopefully I will have my own plantation and will sell that and not have to buy from other farmers.”

Susana, Nausori Market, Fiji: “People are coming into the towns more and there is not much farming done in the villages, if they plant more we could sell more. I really encourage people to grow more.”

Bhima Wati, Nausori Market, Fiji: “We still have to pay the stall fees whether or not we sell anything. Since the hurricane people don’t have much to sell, when they have nothing they close their stall and go home.”

Mere Rodan, Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation representative: “I am in the Human Rights Grant Scheme task force that provides short term funding to institutions or organisations that want to improve human rights. I am looking into the laws of Fiji for employment opportunities for persons with disability. I am employed doing this, and I am taking something back home, after so long confined to a wheelchair. That’s what we want, getting paid for what we do and finding employment outside afterwards. Those of us confined to a wheelchair have to look at the costs of travelling because we have to take taxis, that can take most of our pay, $20 out of a pay of $25 a day. Where I live it is totally in accessible and I need to be carried and I need someone to assist me when I get on and off the taxi and that person has to be paid too. We have to look into all that for a budget for employment.”

As treasurer of the Fiji Disabled Peoples Federation it is my responsibility to take to the executive that women with disability have specific and different issues. We need to work together and focus on one issue at a time, and as a women’s group address the issues with a collaborative approach so people can see we can achieve the same as others. Women need empowerment to prove to men that we can do it, it is not only men to lead us. We need to be treated equally and not given biased treatment in job allocation. I sit on the task force and it is a good way to empower and allow persons with disability to make collective decisions.”

Koila Costello Olsen, executive director for the Pacific Centre for Peace, Fiji: “We are having an eight day workshop on restorative justice training of trainers. We are deeply committed to this area and wanted an opportunity to expose our staff as well as members of the Fiji Correctional Services, Fiji Police and Ministry of Education to look at what restorative justice is. What is the philosophy, practice, and how can we deal with violence in a different way. There are 21 participants.”

Sindhu, acting supervisor of the Pacific Centre for Peace in Labasa, Fiji: “The importance of restorative justice in the use of different tools to go in depth. Some of the things I realized is the way we are speaking, the words we describe to our feelings to others and it is to feel a self if you are an offender or a victim. We try to understand how it feels, how if you are victimized in your life you just blame the offender or you generalize or judge a person, you don’t look at what they could be going through and what could be the reasons for their actions. It is important to show your feelings to the offender and vice versa. Overall I would say restorative justice is taking your responsibilities for what you have done if you have caused harm and also if someone has caused you harm. In this training we learn to express our feelings i a group of people you know will not judge you but will calmly listen to you. I like the methods and training tools, you realize you have been an offender, and much you have gained and lost. All the peace building organisations should use this tool, also put it in use in communities.”

Mohini Lata, Malamala, Fiji: “I live 50km from Nadi town, married for 29 years and never had proper piped water. Women use more water than men, they have to stay clean during their menses. I have spoken to village councilors, heads and discussed about the water situation, but maybe they can’t move on that project, somehow we are hoping to deal with the problem.”

It was difficult with young children, work, and come home and you don’t have water, but the husbands are very supportive and when there was no water in the well they would take the tractor and get it from somewhere else. Most of the rural communities use bulldozers to collect water, cart it home. The women’s part was to control the use of the water. It is more difficult when you or your husband is sick, we have to put the clothes washing aside for one or two days. We manage washing by not using soap, just sprinkling with water, no sponge or detergent. It is always hard during those times. When I was first married I couldn’t even pull up the bucket of water from the well. I would have to wait for my husband to come home from the farm help me, even to have a bath. Now my house is higher up the hill, I can’t carry the bucket up from the well.

It is World Water Day on March 22 annually and it is also about women’s access to water and their right to have clean water for good health and proper sanitation. There is no advisory council in our area and people don’t know who to go to in order to get this issue addressed. We need help to solve our water problem in Malamala.”

Sharon Bhagwan Rolls, femLINKPACIFIC: “It is the woman who bears the burden of not having access to piped water. Mohini’s story clearly highlights the disempowerment because they don’t have water and also do not have access to decision making structures, whether it is the district council or village or settlement committee, they are not giving women an opportunity to raise their priorities.”

We are two years away from the 2015 Millennium Development Goals and yet gender equality is still not being integrated in to development planning and we are seeing this not just over the 29 years of Mohini’s marriage but in her entire lifetime.”
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